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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the responses of students of English as a Second Language (ESL) to teachers' written comments on essay drafts. Subjects were 15 students in intensive college ESL courses. The students wrote essay drafts, which were turned in to teachers for graded comments. The students were then interviewed within three days after receiving the graded final papers. Open-ended interviews focused on the changes students made in successive versions of their essays. Questions elicited an explanation of why each change was made, and how the student decided to make each change. Teacher comments (which could consist of implicit comments, explicit comments, direct corrections, or pointing out an error by underlining, etc). The focus of the comments (content, organization, lexicon, syntax, orthography, punctuation) and student changes (addition, deletion, rearrangement, substitution) were tabulated and analyzed. Results yielded three main conclusions: (1) students did read and use teachers' comments to edit and expand compositions, but did not always understand the need for revision or substantially improve the compositions; (2) teacher comments did not do a good job of intervening in the writing process; and (3) comments often appropriated meaning and the students tolerated the appropriation. (MSE)

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RESPONDING TO OUR RESPONSE: STUDENT STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO TEACHER WRITTEN COMMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of a research project that investigated the responses of fifteen lower-intermediate ESL writing students to their teachers' written comments on their essay drafts. It was found that the majority of comments focused on form rather than content or organization. The changes made by the students mirrored their teachers' comments. Most of the changes were made as a result of direct corrections, which comprised more than half the comments. It is suggested that these written comments led students to edit or to expand their essays by adding details or explanation, rather than to revise by changing or developing meaning. Interviews with students revealed that they did not always understand the comments made by their teachers, even when they made the appropriate change. Students tended to make the changes suggested by their teachers even if those changes altered their intended meaning. It is proposed that requiring multiple drafts and providing strategies for developing meaning on early drafts is more likely to help students revise than is focusing on grammatical problems and directly correcting student writing.

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RESPONDING TO OUR RESPONSE: STUDENT STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO TEACHER WRITTEN COMMENTS

Ruth Chapin and Marjorie Terdal

In our ESL writing classes, we have frequently had the experience of making comments on a student's first draft of a composition and receiving unexpected responses. Sometimes students would delete the passage we had commented on, or they would make no changes in it, or they would make changes which we had not intended by our comments. Or, conversely, students might make every revision suggested by our comments, and still receive a "C" on the paper. We never knew what to tell such students when they confronted us with that "C", saying, "but I did everything you told me to do!"

Concern about how ESL students respond to the comments written on their essays led to the research reported in this article. This study was intended to look at the interaction between the commenting practices of ESL teachers, the response of students to those comments, and the effect of revision on the text in order to answer the following questions:

1. Do ESL students read and use teachers' written comments? How well do they understand the comments? What changes do they make in successive drafts? Are their changes appropriate?
2. Do written comments lead students to revise or to edit? What types of comments lead to revision as opposed to editing.
3. Do students make the changes intended by the teacher even if those changes alter their meaning?

Knowing how students respond to written comments might help ESL writing teachers construct their comments more effectively.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research with Native-English Writing

Traditionally, teachers have responded only to the final product of a student's writing. However, research with native-English writers suggests that comments on final drafts are ineffective in terms of students' writing performance (see for example, Lynch & Klemans, 1978; Burkland & Grimm, 1984; Ziv, 1984; Eland & Evans, 1987). In the current view of writing as a recursive process (Hairston, 1982), revision is seen as an ongoing mental activity, not a one-time event after completion of a draft (Onore, 1984). Comments on early drafts are, thus, more likely to be useful to students than comments on the final draft (Freedman, 1984).

Onore emphasizes that on early drafts teachers should comment on content in order to prolong students' involvement in writing and avoid premature closure of their writing process. Comments on early drafts that focus on form rather than meaning give students the impression that the draft is "a fixed piece, frozen in time, that just needs some editing" (Sommers, 1982, p. 151). In fact, although teachers may state that they give more weight to content and organization when marking compositions, their written comments are related primarily to form (see for example, Searle & Dillon, 1982: Siegal, 1982). It is not surprising then that students tend to think that revision means correcting the surface errors marked by the instructors (Jolley, 1985) or is just a rewording activity (Sommers, 1982).

Between-draft comments that address both form and meaning can be especially confusing. Sommers (1982) notes that students are often contradictorily instructed to make surface editorial changes and to develop the meaning at the same time, but are frequently given no clues as to which problems are most important. Thus, "students' misunderstanding of the revision process as a rewording activity is reinforced by their teachers' comments" (p. 151).

In a study contrasting the revision strategies of experienced and inexperienced native-speaking writers Sommers (1980) found that inexperienced writers generally revise their writing on a surface level, while experienced writers make changes at all levels. Inexperienced writers appear to lack the strategies for revising the entire essay, are passive and teacher-directed, assuming that their teachers will tell them what to do next, and fail to have a sense of writing as discovery. In contrast, experienced writers revise entire passages and shape the text for the reader. Although not all experienced writers produce multiple drafts, even the one-draft writers described by Harris (1989) mentally recast their text before transcribing it into written form oriented to their readers.

Ziv (1984) studied the effects of her written comments on the conceptual and structural (macro) and lexical and sentential (micro) levels of compositions written in her college freshman writing course. The native-speakers in Ziv's study frequently revised without understanding why her direct corrections had been made or avoided dealing with the comments by deleting sections of the text. They responded favorably to the explicit cues with specific suggestions for revising their texts and clarifying their ideas. Implicit cues were

not as helpful because students either did not recognize the problems or lacked the strategies for making the needed revisions.

By directly correcting or actually rewriting portions of compositions, teachers may appropriate student texts. They may allow their own "ideal texts to dictate choices that properly belong to writers" (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982, p. 158). Students, in turn, may perceive writing well as meeting the teacher's subjective standards (Jolley, 1985; Sommers, 1982). Students are often reluctant to change passages written by their teacher, and even those who revise the overall essay are apt to use these passages in succeeding drafts whether or not they are still relevant (Mallonee & Breihan, 1985).

Research with ESL Student Writing

Research with English as a Second Language (ESL) students (Heuring, 1985; Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1983, 1985, 1987) shows many parallels with the native-speaker research in the strategies used by experienced ESL writers and the responding ESL teachers. The unskilled ESL writers in Heuring's study limited their revisions to surface concerns whereas the more skilled writers used revision productively throughout the writing process and revised both surface and deep structure meanings. Zamel (1985) found that ESL writing students also receive mixed messages form the comments on their papers. Some comments appear to address the text as a finished product to be edited, while others view the text as still developing. However, by responding to ESL students' "drafts as work in progress and rais[ing] questions that ask them to reconsider, elaborate, and extend" (Zamel, 1987, p. 710), teachers can help them perceive revision as discovering meaning.

The issue of error correction poses special difficulties for ESL teachers. Non-native writers may not have learned the vocabulary or structure necessary to convey their meaning adequately, or their compositions may be so full of errors that it is difficult to know which errors to point out, and at what point in the writing process to address errors. When teachers tolerate some errors, students often feel more confident writing in the target language than if all their errors are corrected (Hendrickson, 1978). In addition, non-native writers can "assimilate only a small proportion of corrective feedback into their current grammatical system" (Robb & Shortreed, 1986, p. 89).

Research techniques for studying writing process

In order to explore students' composing and revision process, researchers have employed the think-aloud protocol (Raimes, 1985; Ziv, 1984); observation of students while composing (Sperling & Freedman, 1987; Urzua, 1987; Zamel, 1983); questionnaires (Burkland & Grimm, 1984); videotaping students while composing (Heuring, 1985); interviews (Lynch & Klemans, 1978); and analysis of student texts (Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986).

The study reported in this article employs an adaptation of Ziv's (1984) taxonomy of categories of teachers' written comments on the macro (conceptual and structural) and micro (lexical and sentential) levels and the actions taken by student writers in response to those comments. It carries out suggestions by Zamel (1987) that we investigate how teachers' responding practices affect students' behaviors and strategies in revision and by Onore (1984) that we interview writers, examine teacher's commenting practices, and analyze changes in text.

METHOD

The scope of the study was restricted to looking at teachers' comments and revisions. It did not examine the classroom context nor the materials used. The data include interviews with fifteen ESL students, an analysis of their teachers' comments on the first (and in one teacher's case second) drafts of one composition written by each student, and an analysis of the changes made between each draft.

Subjects and setting

All five ESL teachers of lower-intermediate writing in all three intensive higher education ESL programs in the city where the study took place participated in the research project. Four of the teachers, referred to here as Al, Betty, Carol and Doris, had completed MA: TESOL training at the time of the study and had taught ESL for four to seven years. These four considered their writing classes to be process-oriented. The fifth teacher, Ed, had taught ESL overseas for ten years, but did not have advanced TESOL training. His stated philosophy of teaching writing reflected adherence to a product approach; i.e., his goal was an error-free composition.

From each teacher's class three students were selected, the primary criteria being willingness and adequate oral/aural skills to participate in an interview. Those selected were representative of the ESL student population in these programs in gender and native language: seven male and eight female; seven Japanese, five Arabic, two Chinese, and one Korean. They ranged in age from 21 to 30. All had completed high school in their native countries and were pursuing academic degrees in the United States. All had spent less than one year in

an English-speaking background. TOEFL scores for students for students in these lower-intermediate classes ranged approximately from 430 to 480.

Attempts were made not to interfere with the teachers' normal classroom procedures for assigning and responding to papers. The topics assigned by the teachers were diverse: Al's students described their country for a classmate who might like to visit it; Betty's students described a holiday in their country; Carol's students used library sources to write a short research paper; Doris' students described a university department for an audience of new ESL students; Ed's students retold a folk tale. In all but one class only two drafts were required; there were no conferences or peer evaluations; the teachers wrote comments on the first draft and assigned a grade to the final draft. One teacher, Betty, required three drafts. On the first draft she wrote comments related only to content or organization, and on the second draft her comments related primarily to form.

Interviews with the students were held within three days after the students received their graded papers. the informal, open-ended interviews focused on the changes that the students had made in successive version. Interviews took place at the subjects' schools, but outside of the classroom and in private. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was audiotaped and transcribed. The students were asked questions designed to elicit an explanation of why each change was made and how they decided to make each change. In the case of direct corrections made by the teacher, the students were asked to explain the change in order to determine whether in fact they had understood the comment.

Data analysis

The types of written teacher comments and student changes form one draft to the next were categorized along four dimensions and tabulated (Definitions of each category and examples are found in Appendix A). The following types of written comments were established:

1. Implicit comments: comments that point out problems and make suggestions or ask questions to elicit changes;

2. Explicit comments: comments that point out specific problems and tell the writer how to correct them;

3. Direct corrections: comments that make actual changes;

4. Pointing out an error: symbols such as underlining or circling an error or comments that indicate the nature of the problem without explaining it or providing a correction.

Each of these four types of comments was also classified as to the type of problems addressed: 1. Content; 2. Organization; 3. Lexicon; 4. Syntax; 5. Orthography; 6. Punctuation. Categories 3, 4, and 5 are loosely based on Hendrickson's (1978) taxonomy of error analysis. In some of the statistical analyses, categories 1 and 2 were grouped as macro level, and categories 3, 4, 5, and 6 as micro level.

Changes that the students made in their successive drafts were classified according to the same categories. An additional category of NO COMMENT was added to the type of comment to indicate changes made by the student with no prompt from the teacher.

Student responses were also classified according to the form taken by the change: 1. Addition; 2. Deletion; 3. Rearrangement; 4. Substitution.

Student responses were further divided according to the effect of the change made: 1. Respond appropriately; 2. Respond incorrectly; 3. Ignore; 4. Avoid (for example, by deleting or changing the text and thus not dealing with the error). In the statistical analysis, categories 2, 3, and 4 were grouped because all reflected the students' doing something other than what was intended by the comment and because of insufficient numbers in each category for chi-square analysis.

All of the teachers' comments were coded, as were all changes made by students, but for purposes of statistical analysis only the first 25 changes were analyzed in each student's composition. In the case of students in the class that required three drafts, all three drafts were looked at together, with the first 25 changes analyzed regardless of which draft they appeared on. (Appendix B shows a sample coded text.)

Thus, the first 25 changes on the second (and third) drafts for each student were coded along four dimensions: the type of comment that prompted a change (implicit, explicit, direct, pointing out, or no comment); the aspect of text addressed by the change (content, organization, syntax, orthography, punctuation); the form taken by the change (addition, deletion, rearrangement, substitution); and the appropriateness of the change (appropriate, incorrect, ignored, or avoided). Because one student made only 23 changes, and another only 11, statistics were computed on 359 observations. Also the number of words per draft were counted and change in length was computed. To ensure reliability, both authors independently coded all the changes on all papers. Inter-rater reliability ranged from .91 on comment type to .93 on error type. Use of cell agreement for determining reliability is a

conservative measure because it requires that each item be scored independently rather than simply considering group totals for each category on the matrix.

RESULTS

Initial analysis of the data consisted of calculating frequencies and percentages of comments made by the teachers and changes made by the students.

As Figure 1 shows, when the 635 comments of all five teachers were classified, 64% were found to address form (syntax, orthography, and punctuation), and another 20% addressed lexical items. Only 15% of the comments focused on content and less than 1% on organization. Although individual commenting styles varied, all of the teachers addressed the micro level (lexicon, syntax, orthography, and punctuation) more frequently than the macro level (content and organization). The proportion of written comments focusing on the micro level ranged from 68% for Betty to 93% for Ed.

insert Figure 1 here

All of the teachers appear to have attempted to address most or all of their students' errors. Figure 2 shows that a majority of the comments made by all but one of the teachers were direct corrections. The proportion of direct corrections ranged from 37% of Betty's comments to 98% of Ed's. The second most frequent commenting strategy was pointing out errors (11%). Only 9% of the comments were implicit and 5% were explicit. Generally implicit and explicit comments appeared as end or marginal comments while direct correction and comments pointing out errors were interlinear.

insert Figure 2 here

Changes made by the students mirrored the comments made by their teachers. As Figure 3 shows, changes in syntax, orthography, and punctuation accounted for 60% of the changes made by the students and lexical items another 18%, while 19% of the changes affected content and 3% organization. Of the 359 changes made by the students, 78% were at the micro level and 22% at the macro level.

insert Figure 3 here

Figure 4 shows that most changes (55%) were made as the result of direct correction by the teacher. Another 14% of the changes were made as the result of pointing out the error. Only 12% of the changes were made as the result of implicit comments, 4% as the result of explicit comments, and 15% were unprompted by any comment.

insert Figure 4 here

Teachers tended to directly correct or point out lexical, syntactic, orthographic and punctuation errors and to use implicit or explicit comments to address content or organizational issues. Figure 5 shows that students likewise used the teachers' implicit and explicit comments to make changes at the macro level and their direct corrections and pointing out errors to make changes on the micro level. Students responded to 82% of the implicit comments and 67% of the explicit comments by making changes in content. At the other extreme, they responded to 63% of the direct corrections and 49% of the comments pointing out errors by making changes in syntax. The 55 unprompted changes tended to be fairly evenly divided among all aspects of text, with 24% changing syntax and 22% changing content.

insert Figure 5 here

Analysis of the quantitative data, using chi-square analysis, and of the qualitative data from the interviews provides the basis for answers to the questions that guided this research.

The first question investigated how students use their teachers' written comments on their papers. The participants in this study read and responded to their teachers' comments by making appropriate changes. However, students indicated in the interviews that they did not always understand those comments.

All the participants in this study perceived their teachers' comments as useful. They stated that specific questions in the margin or at the end helped them to add details and make their papers longer. Interlinear corrections helped them "fix up" their grammar, which, as one student said, is "very, very important."

As Figure 6 shows, over 80% of the changes were appropriate, whereas 13% resulted in an error of some kind. The students ignored or avoided dealing directly with only 6% of the written comments, usually because, as they stated in the interviews, they did not understand why the teacher had made the correction or did not know what to do. Least helpful were implicit comments related to syntax, such as a question mark in the margin or "This doesn't make sense." One of Doris' students wrote the following sentence:

what do you mean here?

Moreover, most of the books and periodicals are subscribed, bought, and/or sent from library of congress.

The student said in the interview that he did not know why his teacher did not understand the sentence. Because it made sense to him, he did not change it. Another student explained that he had ignored his teacher's question mark after a passage containing an error in the use of a participle because, "I don't understand why she doesn't understand."

insert Figure 6 here

The type of comment made by the teacher affected the appropriateness of the response to some extent. Ninety percent of the changes made as the result of direct correction were made correctly since the student needed only to copy the change onto the next draft. When a comment pointed out an error, 76% of the changes were made correctly, as were 62% of the changes prompted by an explicit comment. Fifty nine percent of the implicit comments led to an appropriate response. As Table 1 shows, chi-square analysis on the relationship between the four kinds of comments and appropriateness or inappropriateness (defined here as incorrect, ignoring, or avoiding) of the response was significant at $p<0.001$. However, outside of direct correction, the type of teacher comment did not significantly affect the appropriateness of student response.

insert Table 1 here

These students were more successful ($p<0.001$) in changing items on the micro level than on the macro level (see Table 2). Eighty four percent of the changes in syntax, orthography, punctuation, and lexicon were made correctly, compared with 67% of the changes related to organization and content.

insert Table 2 here

As expected, students were more likely to understand and response appropriately to corrections of punctuation or syntactic forms already studied. Most of these lower-intermediate ESL students were aware, for example, of rules governing use of articles and subject-verb agreement and made the appropriate change, whether prompted by a direct correction or by a symbol pointing out the error. Some attributed their error to "forgetting"

or "carelessness." Other students recalled class discussion of such writing concepts as transitions or topic sentences and understood what change was needed.

In the interviews nearly all of the students indicated that they had not understood at least some of the direct corrections made by their teachers. Their teachers often made direct corrections on syntactic forms not yet learned by these lower-intermediate students. A student in Ed's class, for example, copied his direct corrections of her errors involving the past perfect and the misuse of a gerund after "stop" even though at the lower-intermediate level she would not be expected to know the rules for these forms.

Direct corrections of lexical items were even less likely to be understood. For example, one of Carol's students did not understand why Carol changed "one of the articles indicate..." to "one of the articles discussed..." because she thought "discuss" could be used only with people. Another student mis-copied two of his teacher's corrections because he mis-read her handwriting.

When errors with lexical and syntactic items were pointed out, rather than directly corrected, students usually consulted a list of correction symbols, their textbook, a dictionary, a roommate, or even another teacher to find out how or why to make a change.

The second question was whether written comments lead students to revise or edit. In analyzing the types of changes made, changes on the micro level (that is, changes in lexical items, syntax, orthography and punctuation) were defined as editing and those on the macro level (content and organization) as revising. The students in this study tended to use written comments to edit surface features. As shown in Figure 3 above, the majority of changes

analyzed in this study focused on form or vocabulary (78%) rather than on content or organization (22%).

Addition and substitution were the most common form of change. As shown in Table 3, nearly 47% of all changes were substitution. Another 34% of the changes were addition, while 14% resulted in deletion. Only 6% involved rearrangement, either of elements within a sentence or on a higher level. Changes that resulted in deleting words or substituting were overwhelmingly at the micro level (84% of the deletions and 98% of the substitutions). Changes that resulted in adding or rearranging were nearly evenly divided between macro and micro levels. When revision took place, it consisted primarily of expansion, in which bits of information were added in response to the teacher's explicit comments.

insert Table 3 here

Students in Al's, Carol's and Doris' classes, who wrote only two drafts, received contradictory messages: to develop their meaning and to "fix" problems of usage and syntax. In the interviews, the students indicated that they were aware that the end comments on content were important and needed to be addressed, but all but two responded primarily to all or most of the teachers' interlinear comments on form.

Betty was the only teacher studied who required three drafts. She responded to the first draft on a separate sheet of paper with several questions related to content or organization and no comments addressing form. On the second draft, she made comments directly on the composition, pointing out errors in form, using terms and symbols from a correction sheet. Her comments on the first draft helped her students to say more about their topics (average word length increased 65% compared with a 22% increase for students in the

other four classes). However, her students expanded their text by adding details without changing the focus or organization. For example, one student describing the Japanese Children's Day wrote:

> Boy put on KIMONO and eats some snacks.

In an end comment, Betty asked:

> Are kimonos traditional clothing? What do they look like? What do they look like? What kind of snacks do children eat? (You can write Japanese names for the food.)

In the next draft, the student expanded his sentence to:

> Boy puts on KIMONO and eats some snacks. KIMONO is a Japanese traditional costume and look like a bath robe. We eat a special snack in this day. Its name is Chimaki that make for rice cakes.

He explained in the interview that he added this "because [Betty] asked me in the papers...because I answered questions and I explained more ..." Although his additions expand the information in his text in response to Betty's questions, they do not reflect revision in the sense of discovering meaning or re-seeing the text.

Only two students revised substantially. In order to do so, they ignored most of their teacher's interlinear comments and direct corrections and focused on the end comments. The student who revised most was in Carol's class. Of the 72 comments on his essay, 7 addressed content implicitly or explicitly. The end comments consisted of a sentence of praise, another implicit comment noting that the thesis was unclear, and explicit suggestions for clarifying it.

The student said during the interview that he did not always look at his first draft as he revised because he was trying to rethink his ideas. Therefore, he did not respond to many of the interlinear comments. His second draft had nearly as many grammatical errors as his first. It was not a great deal better, in form or focus, than the first draft, but it was different.

The third question posed in this research, whether students make the exchanges suggested by their teachers even if those changes alter their intended meaning, can be answered affirmatively. The students in this research copied their teachers' direct corrections whether or not they understood them and even if the corrections altered their intended meaning.

One of Carol's students copied all of her teacher's corrections onto her second draft although she did not understand many of them. For example, Carol changed "popular" to "common" in the student's phrase "popular problem." The student indicated in her interview that she was not aware of the different connotations of the words nor had she attempted to find out why "popular" was inappropriate. On the same paper Carol changed the word "make" to "cause" in several instances, but the student misread the writing and typed "couse" on her final draft, clearly showing that she had copied the correction without understanding.

Ed made the following changes in a student's version of a Japanese fairy tale, which she copied verbatim in her final draft:

The however, of The and when the old woman
Sparrow ate some starch, ~~then she~~ found it, ~~and~~ cut she was very mad. So she cut out the sparrow's tongue.

In the interview the student explained by drawing a picture that the woman cut off the tip of the sparrow's tongue, not the entire tongue. Also, she intended to show a result by her use of "so," which the teacher negated by his substitution of "and."

Appropriation of meaning may even occur when a teacher makes syntactical assumptions. Ed changed this passage in a fairy tale as shown:

On the way ~~she went back home~~, she opened the box. There ~~were~~ was a monster in ~~there~~ it.

In the interview the student said that she had meant to write "were" and had neglected to make "monster" plural. She was reluctant to contradict her teacher's assumption that "monster" was meant to be singular.

These students seemed to accept the teacher's right to set standards for their writing even though they may have considered those standards idiosyncratic. Each of Ed's students began her retelling of a folk tale with the traditional opening, "Once upon a time there was...." In each case Ed deleted "there was" and substituted another structure. In the interview one student explained her acceptance of the change: "He said we shouldn't use 'there is' with a person or thing. It's his rule."

When teachers directly corrected or pointed out most of the students' errors, the students were less likely to find the rest of their own errors. For example, one of Betty's students wrote on his first draft:

I will take you Tokyo Disneyland.

Because Betty did not comment on form on the first draft, the student copied the sentence onto his second draft. This time, Betty added "to" before Tokyo, and he copied the direct

correction onto his third draft. However, Betty did not directly correct or point out another omission of "to" in this sentence:

I'll take you Mt. Fuji.

And the student did not correct this error on his third draft. It appears that he relied on his teacher to find his errors.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data leads us to three main conclusions. First, these students did read and use their teachers' comments to edit and expand their compositions, but they did not always understand why the changes were needed; nor did they substantially improve their compositions.

Lower-intermediate ESL students may be inexperienced writers, struggling not only with learning a new language, but also with learning new principles of writing. They may never before have been expected to revise a composition as part of a writing assignment and may be unsure of what is expected of them when they revise. Most of these students, like the inexperienced writers studied by Sommers (1982) and Zamel (1983), edited, and some expanded upon, their preliminary drafts. Like the inexperienced writers in Ziv's (1984) study, they focused on surface structure and made changes at the word level rather than on a conceptual or structural level. They tended to limit their revising to copying their teacher's changes and following their teacher's instructions.

The two students who revised the most substantially ignored most of the interlinear comments and focused on the end comments. These comments may have helped them recognize "dissonance," Sommers' (1980) term for the difference between the writer's intent

and what s/he has actually written. Their second drafts were more lively and informative than their first drafts, but, as one might expect, contained many new mechanical errors. As Onore (1984) says, revision need not result in improvement; teachers should help students to separate revision from improvement and connect it with exploration. Perhaps if these students had the opportunity to revise further, their compositions would then have improved.

Second, these teacher's written comments did not seem to do a very good job of intervening in the writing process to teach "strategies for invention and discovery" or to help students "generate content and discover purpose," as Hairston (1982, p. 86) believes teachers should do.

According to the evidence of this study, implicit comments on the macro level led these students to expand their compositions by providing more information for the reader and helped students rearrange their information. Implicit comments on the micro level, however, were confusing to students who needed specific suggestions as to how the change should be made.

As Ziv (1984) found, explicit comments were helpful because they explained what was wrong and provided specific suggestions for making the change. The explicit comments used by the teachers in this study helped the students to expand their essays but not to refocus or reorganize.

The usage comments made by these teachers helped students to correct errors (or directly corrected the errors) but did not provide them with strategies for improving language usage, adding complexity, or emphasizing or subordinating ideas. Except for direct

corrections, none of the comments resulted, for example, in a student's combining two simple sentences into a complex sentence subordinating one of the ideas to another.

Pointing out errors may have been more effective than direct correction in terms of promoting student learning as long as students had sufficient knowledge of English to interpret the comments correctly or could seek help from other sources.

Direct corrections, the most frequently used strategy by these teachers, helped students to produce mechanically correct compositions, which were often rewarded by high grades. Since nearly two thirds of all the teachers' comments were direct corrections addressing syntax, orthography, or punctuation, a student in one of these classes might well conclude that form is more important than meaning. According to Zamel (1985), making surface level corrections creates the impression for students that local errors are at least as important as meaning-related issues. By directly correcting even those forms not yet taught, the teachers in this study reinforced the idea that good writing means error-free essays.

The third conclusion is that these teachers' written comments often appropriated meaning and students tolerated this appropriation. Like Sperling and Freedman's (1987) "good girl," the students in this study seemed to value compliant behavior. They made almost all of the changes suggested by their teachers even when their intended meaning was changed.

Because it may be culturally unacceptable to challenge a teacher, or simply because of their lack of skill in English, ESL students may be especially reluctant to omit or change text provided by their teacher. These teachers' comments seemed to reinforce the role of student as dependent upon the teacher as authority. According to Brannon and Knoblauch (1982), the normal reader-writer relationship is altered in a classroom situation. The teacher, not the

writer, decides what the topic will be, what form it will take, and what criteria will determine its success. Brannon and Knoblauch assert that the teacher conceives an "ideal text" and proceeds to point out discrepancies between the students' writing and that ideal. Ed's insistence on mechanically correct essays fit his stated description of an ideal text as one that is error-free. Betty's assignment, the most structured of all those studied, required her students to match her ideal text, a three-paragraph essay, with introduction, body and conclusion.

Teacher comments that emphasize students' failure to match the ideal text may also teach students that nothing they do by themselves is good enough. Students may then be unwilling to venture much of themselves. Although 15% of the changes made by all the students were unprompted, most of those made minor additions to content or substituted one word for another, such as changing "likes to visit" to "plans to visit," or "husband" to "old man."

When teachers appropriate student writing by directly correcting their errors, students may relinquish the responsibility for error-finding to the teacher. This lends support to Raimes' (1985) speculation that unskilled ESL writers are not preoccupied with error as they compose and revise because they recognize their imperfect use of the language and expect their teacher to correct their errors. At the same time it seems to counter the supposition (see Jolley, 1985) that students (native-speakers in her study) will find many of their own errors as they work through the revising process. As Hendrickson (1978) points out, lower-intermediate ESL students, in particular, need specific clues to locate and solve their errors

and help in distinguishing between errors that interfere with communication of meaning and those that affect single elements within a sentence.

It may be particularly tempting for ESL teachers to appropriate students' writing that contains global errors, ambiguous meaning, or serious stylistic problems. Intervening in the writing process as a reader interested in understanding the text may help students get their message across successfully without the teacher's taking over ownership of the text.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

This study supports many of the conclusions found in other research with both native-speaker and ESL writers. The following suggestions might help ESL writing teachers construct their comments more effectively.

First, explicit comments on student drafts asking for clarification and elaboration provide teachers the opportunity to initiate a dialogue with students and encourage students to negotiate meaning. Explicit comments addressing surface errors (e.g., "use past tense here") may encourage students to employ strategies for discovering the correct form. However, comments that directly correct errors may lead to appropriation of students' writing and may reinforce their belief that nothing they do by themselves can match the ideal of the teacher.

Second, detailed end notes that respond to or question the overall thesis may help students to "recognize and resolve the dissonance they sense in their writing" (Sommers, 1980, p. 152). End comments that suggest specific strategies for revision are more useful than comments that directly change or correct students' writing, or that make suggestions. For example, "needs more detail" is not as useful as "you need to tell your reader more about each place you plan to visit."

Third, requiring only two drafts necessitates that teachers' comments address both content and form simultaneously. Requiring multiple drafts, however, is much more likely to help students revise than is forcing them to edit too early in the writing process. On early drafts, comments that help students to focus on meaning, to elaborate, and to correct global errors that interfere with meaning seem to be most helpful. On later drafts, comments should help students clarify meaning at the micro level. ESL students, at least at the lower-intermediate level, are not likely to find many of their own errors; thus, on later drafts comments pointing out errors of form are helpful, provided that those forms have previously been taught.

Fourth, even with multiple drafts expecting an error-free composition at the lower-intermediate level is unrealistic and may take student's attention away from their purpose in writing. Hendrickson's (1978) recommendation that global errors that impede the intelligibility of a message be addressed first is useful in determining priority for correction.

Finally, teachers should not insist on a fixed number of drafts. As with native speakers, some ESL students dash off a first draft while others have already revised extensively before they hand in their first draft. The goal is not revision, but a good piece of writing.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although studying the interaction of text, student, and teacher reveals how students respond to their teachers' comments, it does not tell us much about the long-term effects of these comments. A longitudinal study to ascertain whether learning occurs as a result of written comments on student drafts would add to our understanding of students' revision

processes. A study employing observation of classroom instruction could take into consideration the larger teacher-learning context that affects the students' responses. It would be worthwhile to examine what the students are explicitly taught about revising, editing, exploring, organizing, grammar, vocabulary, and conventions; what the stated goals of the writing course are; and what materials are used. We need to know more about what is going on in the writing classroom.

While this study revealed that students are often successful in understanding and applying their teachers' written comments, their unsuccessful responses alert us to what we can do to improve our commenting practices and help our students improve the way they write.

FIGURE 1
Aspect of Text Addressed by Teacher Comments

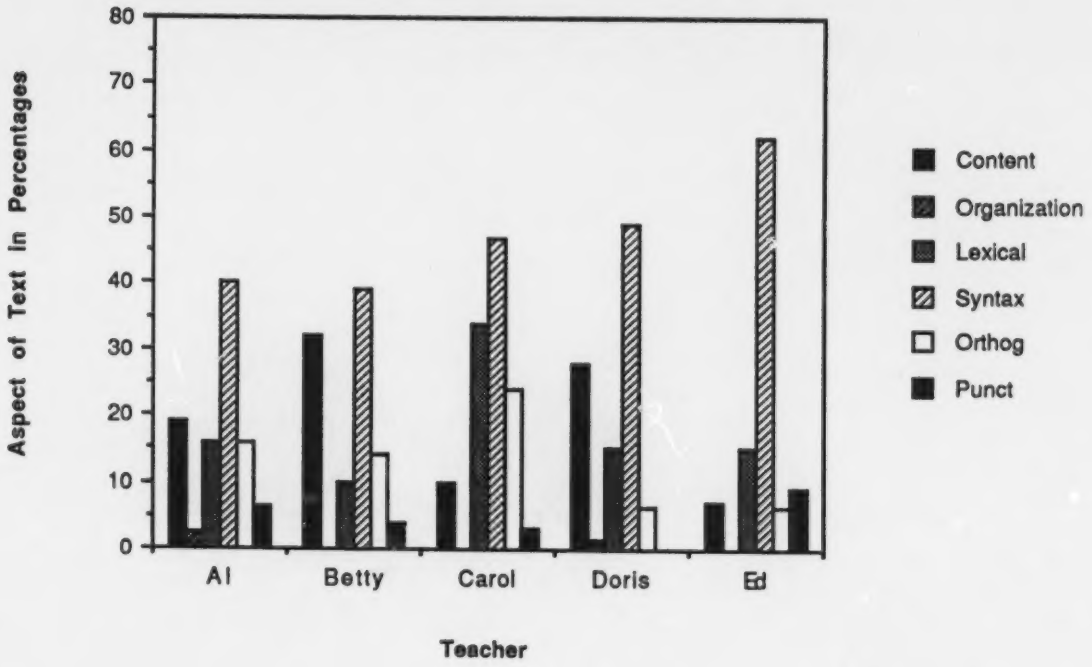

FIGURE 2
Type of Comment Made by Teachers

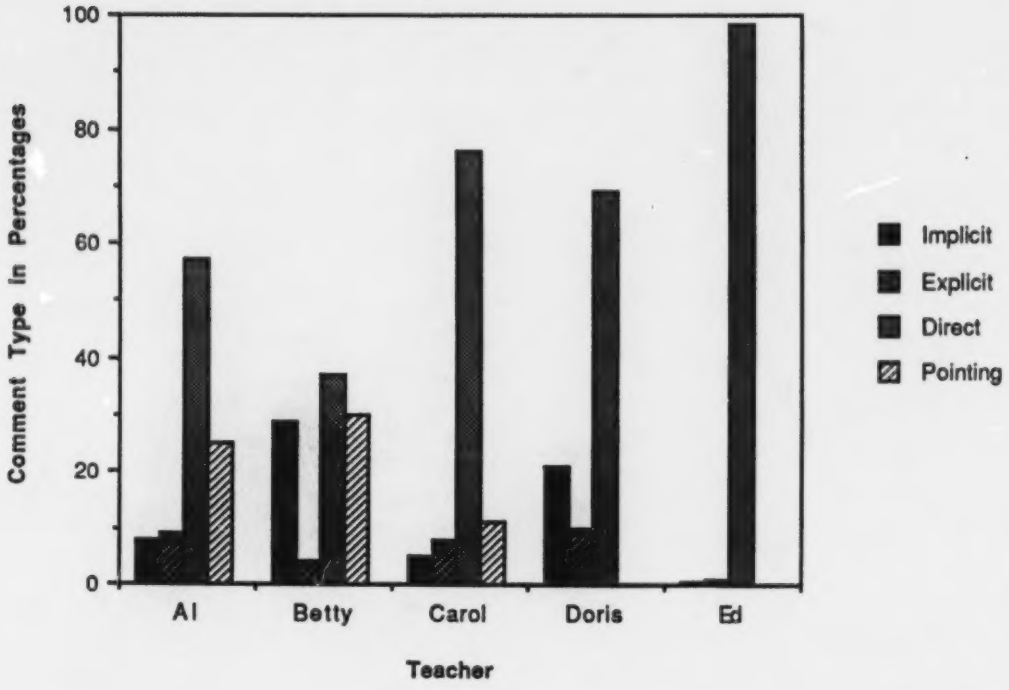

Figure 3
Aspect of Text Changed by Students

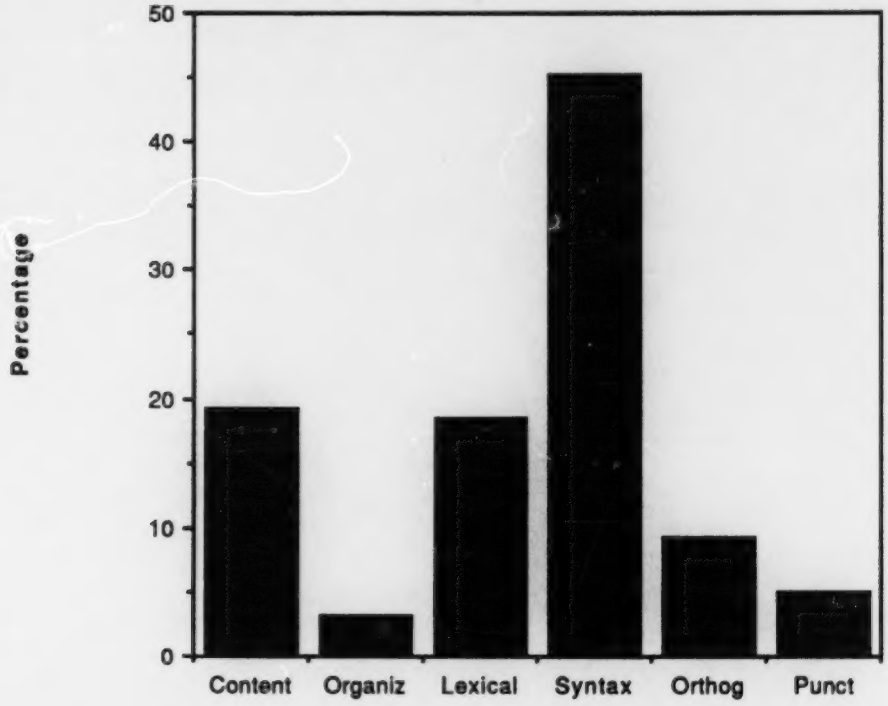

Figure 4
Comment Type Prompting Changes

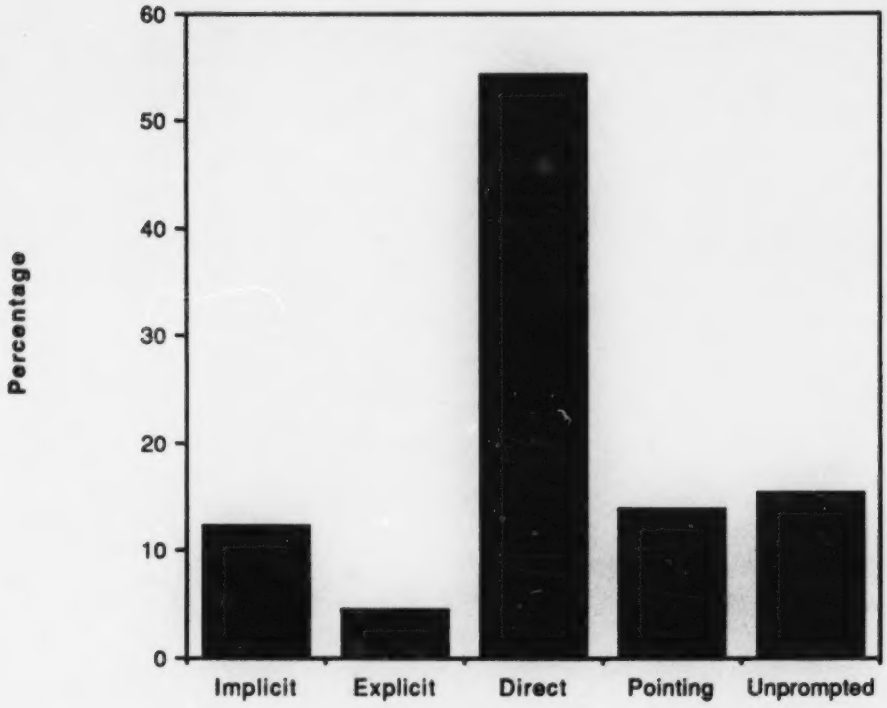

FIGURE 5
Student Changes in Text by Comment Type

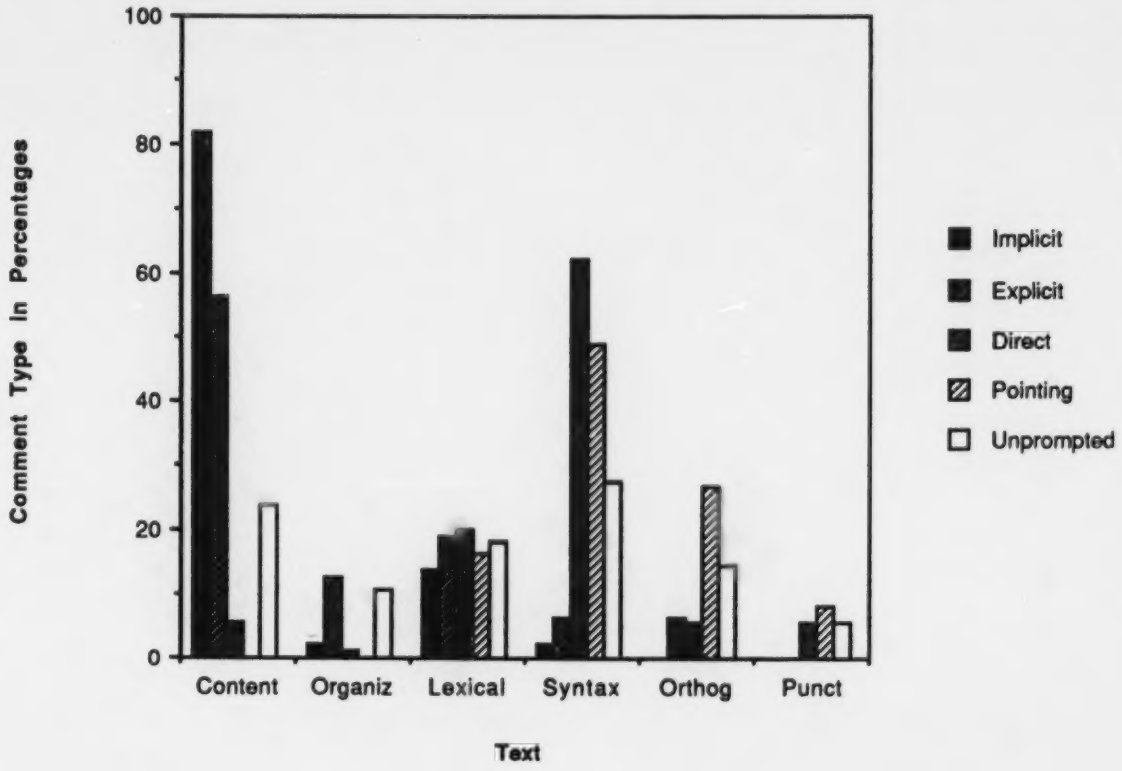

FIGURE 6
Appropriateness of Student Changes

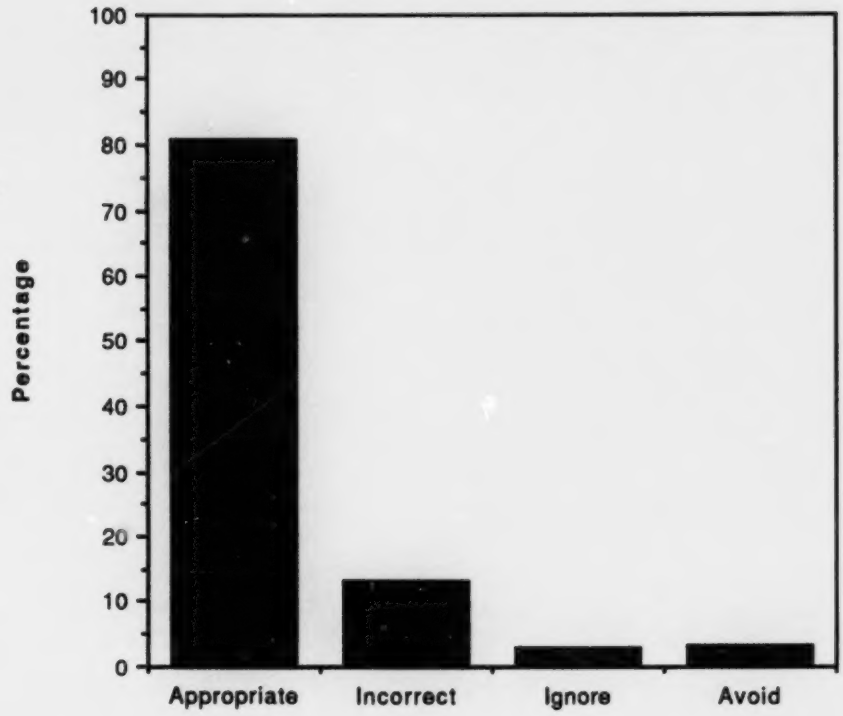

TABLE 1

Appropriateness of Response to Comment Type

Comment Type	Implicit	Explicit	Direct	Pointing	Totals
Appropriate					
frequency	26	10	176	37	249
row %	10.44	4.02	70.68	14.86	81.91
column %	59.09	62.50	90.26	75.51	
Inappropriate					
frequency	18	6	19	12	55
row %	32.73	10.91	34.55	21.82	18.09
column %	40.91	37.50	9.74	24.49	
Totals	44	16	195	49	304**
	14.47	5.26	64.14	16.12	

X^2 (3df) = 30.0498 *(approx P<0.001)

* P value is approximate because 1 cell has expected frequency less than 5.

** Totals do not include Unprompted Responses

TABLE 2

Appropriateness of Response on Macro and Micro Levels

Level of Text	Macro	Micro	Totals
Appropriate			
Frequency	54	234	288
Row %	18.75	81.25	80.22
Column %	67.50	83.87	
Inappropriate			
Frequency	26	45	71
Row %	36.62	63.38	19.78
Column %	32.50	16.13	
Totals	80	279	359
	22.28	77.72	

X^2 (1df) = 9.4959 (P<0.002)

TABLE 3

Changes to Text at Macro and Micro Levels

Level of Text	Macro	Micro	Totals
Addition			
Frequency	58	64	122
Row %	47.54	52.46	33.98
Column %	72.50	22.94	
Deletion			
Frequency	8	41	49
Row %	16.33	83.67	13.65
Column %	10.00	14.70	
Rearranging			
Frequency	11	10	21
Row %	52.38	47.62	5.85
Column %	13.75	3.58	
Substitution			
Frequency	3	164	167
Row %	1.80	98.20	46.52
Column %	3.75	58.78	
Totals	80	279	359
	22.28	77.72	

X^2 (3df) = 97.4021 (approx P 0.001)*

* P value is approximate because 1 cell has expected frequency less than 5.

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APPENDIX A
CATEGORIES FOR CODING CHANGES

A. COMMENT TYPE

1. Implicit comments: comments that point out problems and make suggestions or ask questions to elicit changes; e.g., "You need more details." or "I don't understand the next to last sentence. Can you explain this another way?"

2. Explicit comments: comments that point out specific problems and tell the writer how to correct them; e.g., "I think you need to separate these sentences." or "Tell me where this happened."

3. Direct corrections: comments that make actual changes; e.g., writing in the correct spelling of a misspelled word.

4. Pointing out an error: symbols or abbreviations that point out the place of an error or indicate the nature of the problem without explaining it or providing a correction; e.g., "SP" for spelling, underlining an error, "Tense" to indicate an error with verb tense.

5. Unprompted Change: any addition, deletion, substitution, or other change in text made on the second draft with no prompting comment on the first draft.

B. ASPECT OF TEXT ADDRESSED BY TEACHER COMMENTS

1. Content: comments that suggest confusing content or suggest adding, omitting, expanding, or changing content.

2. Organization: comments that note confusing or inappropriate presentation of the material or suggest a change in order of phrases, sentences, or paragraphs.

3. Lexicon: comments that note the misuse (in the sense of meaning or word form) or omission of or suggest a change in any noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, or adverb.

4. Syntax: comments that note misuse or omission of or suggest a change in any function word (i.e., article, demonstrative or possessive adjective, modal, qualifier, preposition, conjunction, subordinator, sentence connector, question word), word order, subordinate clause, plural or singular form, verb tense, or otherwise uncategorized syntactic classes.

5. Orthography: comments that suggest a change in spelling or capitalization.

6. Punctuation: comments that suggest a change in punctuation, including paragraph division.

C. FORM TAKEN BY THE CHANGE

1. Addition: any change that adds a word, phrase, or sentence

2. Deletion: any change that deletes a word, phrase, or sentence.

3. Rearrangement: any change that moves a word, phrase, or sentence to a new position.

4. Substitution: any change that substitutes a different word, phrase, or sentence.

D. EFFECT OF CHANGE

1. Appropriate: any change made correctly in response to a written comment;
   1st draft: "Education is one of the common probrem in everywhere."
   2nd draft: "Education is one of the common problems everywhere."

2. Inappropriate: any change that results in a new error;
   e.g., 1st draft: "The population probrem makes another probrem too."
   2nd draft: "The population problem couses another problem too."

3. Ignore: not making a change suggested by a comment;
   e.g., 1st draft: "You can borrow a ball and all what you need for free."
   2nd draft: "You can borrow a ball and all what you need for free."

4. Avoid: deleting a passage on which a comment was made or rewriting it so that the word or phrase to be changed no longer appears in the text:
   e.g., 1st draft: "She asked me where I'm going to talk her if she visits me next summer."
   2nd draft: "She asked me which places where going to visit."

APPENDIX B

This example shows the revision of the concluding paragraph of the essay that was most significantly revised. On the first draft, comments are shown exactly as written by the teacher. On the second draft, the first 20 changes are numbered. Coding for these 20 changes is shown below the second draft.

First draft:

In these days some people are afread to fly on the air lines which were hijacked before; subject+verb? to choose other safe flight. In this case the air lines companies will lose its costomers. So, the air lines companies should protect their costomers who are aboard their airlines by using more security to avoide ~~from happening~~ the hijacked and should support the airlines with a good techonology to stop the persons who are holding the weapons inside the airplane. When a hijak happen the airlines companies or the governments should use the safe as possible to negotiate with the hijakers. Because the hijackers are "selling their life to reach their aim," so the better way to treat the crisis with a safe way instead of using the foce and killing the hostages In fact, all the people are responsible to use this facilities to help the human beings not to kill them.

The end comments consisted of a sentence of praise, the teacher's outline of the composition, and the following:

> Suggestions for your next draft:
> Be sure your thesis is clearly stated in the 1st or 2nd P. I'm not quite sure what it is. It seems to be that airlines improve communication--or perhaps that they involved many dangers. But your conclusion talks more about what airlines should do to prevent hijackings. If your main point is to urge precautions against hijacking, then you need to make that point in your first P, and it needs to tie your whole composition together.

Second draft:

The passengers will usually be the victimes in like this crisis when no concession have been made by either side. In these days, some people are afraid to fly on the airlines which were hijacked before so, they choose other safe airlines. So in this case the airline company loses its coustomers. I thing the good way for the air lines companies to avoide the hijacking problemes and to protect their coustomes who are aboarding on the airlines, should use more scurity and supporting the airlines with good technology to stop the persons who are carrying weapons from get on the airline. On the other hand the government should use the safest way possible to ending the problem. Fore example the government try to use nonviolently instead use the force which most of the time doesn't work, and try to negotiate with the hijackers to discuss the problem between them. In short the hijacking problems usualy have a sad end and sometimes difficult to find a solution for the problem so the nonviolence and negotiation are the best or the safe ways to solve the crisis.

Change	Comment Type	Aspect of Text	Form of Change	Effect of Change
1	5	1	1	2
2	3	4	1	1
3	3	5	4	1
4	5	4	1	1
5	5	6	4	2
6	4	4	1	1
7	5	3	4	1
8	5	4	1	2
9	3	3	4	1
10	4	4	4	1
11	3	5	4	2
12	5	2	3	2
13	3	5	4	3
14	3	4	2	1
15	2	3	4	1
16	5	3	1	2
17	4	5	4	2
18	2	4	4	2
19	4	5	4	3
20	5	3	4	2